

Hamas urges Muslim nations to act to end Gaza 'genocide'

AFP, Gaza City

Hamas has called on Arab and Muslim nations to take urgent action to halt Israel's renewed offensive on Gaza, saying they had a "direct moral and political responsibility" to "end the genocide".

Israel resumed its air campaign early Tuesday with a wave of deadly strikes, shattering a relative calm that had pervaded in the war-ravaged Palestinian territory since a ceasefire took hold on January 19.

On Thursday, the military said that troops had resumed ground operations in the southern area of Rafah, while continuing activity in other parts of the territory.

Gaza's civil defence agency said 504 people had been killed since Israeli air strikes began, including more than 190 under the age of 18.

The toll is among the highest since the war started more than 17 months ago with Hamas's attack on Israel.



In a statement, Hamas said the "continued massacres... place direct political and moral responsibility on the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to end the genocide carried out in full view of the entire world."

"We call on the Arab and Islamic countries to take urgent action in the international forums, particularly the UN's Security Council, and implement immediate measures to halt the aggression," it added.

Israel's renewed offensive after talks on extending the truce reached an impasse has drawn widespread international condemnation.

The first stage of the ceasefire, under which Israeli hostages held by Hamas were exchanged for Palestinian prisoners, expired early this month.

Israel rejected negotiations for a second stage, demanding the return of all remaining hostages under an extended first stage. Hamas insisted on engaging in talks for phase two.



Palestinians use animal-pulled carts to transport their belongings as they flee Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip following a Israeli evacuation order yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

RUSSIAN GAS TRANSIT FACILITY ATTACK Rivals trade blame

Doubts rise over US-backed energy ceasefire; Kyiv says still in talks with US about minerals deal

AGENCIES

Russia and Ukraine yesterday accused each other of blowing up a Russian gas pumping station in a border area where Ukrainian troops have been retreating, amid talks over a proposed US-backed moratorium on attacks on energy infrastructure.

Video footage showed a blaze at the Sudzha facility, which is located inside Russia several hundred metres from the Ukrainian border.

It is inside a pocket of Russian territory that had been captured by Ukrainian forces last year, but which Moscow has mostly recovered from in heavy fighting in recent weeks. Russian troops pushed Ukrainian forces out of the nearby town of Sudzha last week.

Russia's defence ministry said Ukraine's troops had left the pumping station and blown it up in their retreat. Moscow described this as a violation of the moratorium on attacks on energy

infrastructure, which it said it has abided by since a phone call between President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump on Tuesday.

Kyiv said Russian forces had blown up the facility themselves as a provocation, describing Russia's accusations as fake.

Putin agreed to the pause in attacks on energy facilities during his phone call with Trump when Putin rejected a proposal for a more comprehensive 30-day ceasefire. Kyiv says it is prepared to accept the proposal if hammered out formally in talks.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, said it had opened a criminal case over what it called "an act of terrorism" which had done "significant damage" to the gas transit facility, which once took Russian gas to Europe.

The Ukrainian military accused Russian forces of shelling it with artillery in a false flag "provocation".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov yesterday said that Putin's order for Russian forces to temporarily halt attacks

on energy infrastructure in Ukraine remained in force, and the Sudzha explosion showed Ukraine could not be trusted to keep its word.

Separately, a new explosion rocked an oil depot in Russia's Krasnodar region yesterday where firefighters had been trying to extinguish a blaze that had broken out on Tuesday after a Ukrainian drone attack.

Russia has pounded Ukraine's energy grid throughout the war, causing frequent blackouts affecting civilians and industry.

Meanwhile, Ukraine is continuing to hold talks with the United States about a minerals deal, a foreign ministry spokesman said yesterday.

The White House said on Wednesday it had moved beyond "just the economic minerals deal framework" and was focused on peace between Ukraine and Russia, and President Donald Trump said on Thursday that the US would sign the minerals and natural resources deal with Ukraine shortly.

X sues India govt over content regulation

AFP, Mumbai

Elon Musk's social media platform X has filed a lawsuit against the Indian government over its use of takedown orders to request social media content be removed.

India, the world's biggest democracy, regularly ranks among the top five countries globally for the number of requests made by a government to remove social media content.

X's new lawsuit marks the platform's latest challenge against the Indian government's censorship powers and comes as Musk's Starlink and Tesla prepare to enter the world's fifth-largest economy.

The case centres around the government's use of a key legal provision to issue blocking orders, which X alleges bypasses existing safeguards.

"According to X, this provision... is being misused to create an unlawful parallel mechanism for blocking information," Indian legal news website Bar and Bench reported on Thursday.

The case will be heard by an Indian court in the southern state of Karnataka on March 27, after a brief hearing early this week did not reach a conclusion.

US threats 'will get them nowhere': Khamenei

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader yesterday said that US threats against his country "will get them nowhere" after President Donald Trump warned of possible military action against the Islamic Republic.

"The Americans should know threats will get them nowhere when confronting Iran," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in his live annual televised speech marking Nowruz, the Persian New Year.

He said Americans "and others should know that if they do anything malign to the Iranian nation, they will get a hard slap".

On March 7, Trump said he had written to Khamenei, urging negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear programme and warning of potential military action if it refuses.

On Wednesday, US news website Axios, citing a US official and other sources, reported that Trump's letter set a "two-month deadline for reaching a new nuclear deal".

It did not specify a start or end date of the two-month period.



Take action to uphold freedom of expression

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other journalists were injured in the incident. Six suspects were later produced in court on February 24.

On the same day, four journalists were attacked by masked assailants wielding bamboo sticks and firearms in Lakshmipur. Two days later, three journalists were reportedly assaulted by BNP men on the Supreme Court premises.

On February 9, police officers allegedly beat five journalists covering a protest in Dhaka. Additionally, on February 25, a BNP member in Thakurgaon was reported to have assaulted a journalist following an article accusing him of extortion.

The statement said that it is not only journalists that have faced attacks, but authors and poets and human rights defenders too.

On February 10, a group attacked a bookstore at the Amar Ekushey Book Fair for allegedly selling books by exiled writer Taslima Nasreen. While Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus ordered an investigation, no perpetrators have been held accountable, the statement said.

On February 13, poet Sohel Galib was arrested for "hurting religious sentiment" through a poem. Similarly, on March 3, the Dhaka Cyber Tribunal ordered an investigation against human rights defender Rakhal Raha for a Facebook post that questioned free speech

restrictions in Galib's case.

The UN Human Rights Committee has stated that freedom of speech protections under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) extend even to expression deemed offensive. The Rabat Plan of Action also clarifies that freedom of religion does not include immunity from criticism or ridicule.

The rights groups said that Bangladesh's legal framework on cyber security also enables impermissible restrictions on freedom of expression.

On February 25, Kurigram police sought the arrest of writer Nahid Hasan under this law for "hurting religious sentiment".

The Cyber Security Act (CSA), a draconian piece of legislation, which has previously been used against government critics, human rights defenders, journalists and bloggers, in a manner which contravenes their right to freedom of expression. The provision in the CSA relating to hurting religious sentiment has, in the past, been used to curb freedom of expression and harass human rights defenders under the guise of religion, the statement said.

Despite the interim government's commitment to repealing the CSA, its proposed replacement, the Cyber Protection Ordinance 2025, retains

problematic provisions, including those criminalising offences related to religion. Human rights groups have expressed disappointment over the lack of meaningful consultation in drafting the new law.

The human rights groups acknowledged the challenges faced by Bangladesh's interim government following the ousting of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's administration.

However, they stressed that genuine reforms are necessary to ensure stability during the transition.

The organisations urged the government to conduct transparent consultations on any new legislation and align it with international human rights standards, drop all charges against individuals detained solely for exercising free speech, and repeal laws that restrict expression on religious grounds.

They urged the government to ensure no arrests under the CSA while it remains in effect, investigate attacks on journalists and media workers, and prosecute perpetrators fairly and protect journalists, activists, and human rights defenders from intimidation and violence.

The groups emphasised that journalists and activists must be allowed to operate without fear, and the government must uphold its obligation to protect freedom of expression in Bangladesh.

Hundreds rally demanding

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general of Khilafat Majlis called for an end to the genocide in Gaza, a halt to attacks and persecution of Muslims in India, and opposing any attempts to rehabilitate the Awami League in Bangladesh.

Mamunul, also former joint secretary general of Hefazat, urged the government to take diplomatic initiatives through the United Nations and other international bodies to stop the genocide in Gaza.

He warned India, stating, "If Aurangzeb's tomb is desecrated, the Muslims of this country will not remain silent. If necessary, we will march towards Aurangzeb's tomb."

Regarding the Awami League, he said, "The people of this country have removed them, and any attempt to rehabilitate them will not be tolerated. If efforts are made to reinstate the Awami League, it will have to be done over our dead bodies."

Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh's Naib-e-Ameer, Ahmed Ali Qasemi, also condemned and protested against the brutal attacks on Palestinians in Gaza.

In addition to demanding an end to the aggression against Indian Muslims, he accused India of betraying the people of Bangladesh by sheltering Sheikh Hasina. He warned that any attempt to bring the Awami League back to power would be resisted by students and the public.

Meanwhile, protest rallies were also held in various parts of Dhaka and across the country, demanding justice for Israel's brutal attacks on Palestine and condemning the genocide in Gaza.

Two dead in clash over establishing

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clashed with them.

Sujan Chandra Sarkar, additional superintendent of police, said, "We have received reports of two deaths. We have so far recovered the body of one of them. The situation in the area is currently under control, and police are taking legal measures."

Nagorik Committee

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dissolved all committees.

A press release from the Nagorik Committee said that the posts of coordinator, general secretary, spokesperson, and chief organiser would remain functional for the next 15 days and they would determine the future leadership structure.

It also said that the Nagorik Committee would continue to operate as a civil-political platform.

However, a Nagorik Committee leader said that they were holding discussions at their party forum to finalise the new leadership.

"We are hopeful of announcing the new leadership before Eid. Some new faces are also likely to be inducted to the Nagorik Committee," a joint convener of the NCP told The Daily Star.

"Since its inception, the Nagorik Committee has been introducing it as a social-political pressure group. After the changes, the Nagorik Committee will focus more on that,"

said the joint convener.

Talking to this correspondent, Sarwar Tusher, the central joint convener of NCP, said, "Both platforms [SAD and Nagorik Committee] will remain active as socio-political platforms. Discussions are ongoing among us to determine the future of Students Against Discrimination, including changing its name and operational framework. The process is underway, but no final decision has been made."

SAD was formed in July last year. It spearheaded the quota reform protest that eventually turned into a mass movement to topple the Awami League government.

On September 8, the Jatiya Nagorik Committee was formed with the goal of restructuring the state, abolishing fascist systems, and successfully establishing the political framework of a "new Bangladesh". Leaders and activists from various organisations that were involved in the movement are members of the platform.

Don't try to rehabilitate

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such a situation, holding local polls before the national polls would mean creating an opportunity to rehabilitate these fugitive fascists back into politics," he added.

BNP leader Tarique claimed that the way reforms and elections have been pitted against each other now is undoubtedly "politically motivated".

"To those who argue that national elections should be held only after reforms are completed, I would like to say -- what would be completed are not reforms... Reforms are never-ending, continuous process..." he said.

The BNP acting chief said over the past one and a half decades of "mafia rule", nearly 35 million young voters have been deprived of their right to vote.

Holding the national election must be the first step in ensuring their political empowerment, he added.

Presiding over the programme, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir urged everyone "to act with caution".

"We believe that at this moment, wherever we are, we must act responsibly. Those of us in politics, in different professions, connected to the government and the people -- we must all speak and act in a way that makes the path to democratic progress

smoother," he said.

He emphasised that to tackle the ongoing problems, crises, and challenges, holding elections as soon as possible is crucial.

"The wisest task now will be to complete the necessary reforms to hold the elections.

"Our appeal to the people is that during this transitional period, we must all move forward with patience and peace," he said.

Israel threatens

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civilian population areas and soldiers by implementing a permanent Israeli occupation of the area".

AFP images from northern Gaza yesterday showed donkey-pulled carts piled high with belongings as residents fled their homes along rubble-strewn roads.

Israel resumed intensive bombing of Gaza on Tuesday, citing deadlock in indirect negotiations on the next steps in the truce after its first stage expired early this month.

Its resumption of large-scale military operations was coordinated with US President Donald Trump's administration but drew widespread condemnation.